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Reviews

1943

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THEATRE CRITICS' REVIEWS IS A COMPLETE GUIDE AND RECORD TO THE NEW YORK SHOWS

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"Tomorrow the World"

NEW YORK POST
April 15, 1943

"Tomorrow the World" Opens Auspiciously at the Barrymore

WILELLA WALDORF

AN UNCOMMONLY interesting and provocative play aptly entitled "Tomorrow the World" was produced by Theron Bamberger last night at the Barrymore Theatre.

The authors, James Gow and Arnaud d'Usseau, raise a problem that is bound to assume staggering proportions as time goes on—the problem of the Hitler-trained youth and how the world is going to cope with them when the war is over.

For purposes of illustration, they introduce just one boy of twelve, fresh from Hitlerland, into the ordinary American home of a Mid-Western college professor. Emil Bruckner is half-German, half-American. His mother was the professor's sister, his father an enlightened German philosopher whose opposition to the new regime sent him to his death in a concentration camp.

Emil's uncle, an American chemistry professor who used to drink beer and discuss philosophy with the elder Bruckner during student days in Leipzig, assumes thoughtlessly that Emil will be a chip off the old block. But he had underrated the efficiency of the Hitler Youth Movement.

Hitler Youth in Full Uniform

Emil arrives at his new home wearing a Nazi uniform, complete with Swatiska armband, under his shabby blue traveling suit, and starts Heiling Hitler and seriously working for the Gestapo like the Junior Himmler he has become. He wore the uniform under his suit because he knew perfectly well his luggage would be examined on his entrance into the United States.

At first the professor, his household and his fiancee, who teacher at the Experimental School, make the mistake of considering Emil just a rather quaint and astonishing child, but they soon realize that his training abroad has included more than the art of reciting the customary Nazi denunciations of America, the Jews, etc.

He has learned to be a liar and schemer whose treachery goes far beyond anything they have ever experienced. All of their theories of child psychology, the usual methods of dealing with maladjusted adolescents, break down when it comes to handling Emil.

They are pretty well licked, but not quite. After a very moving third act, the play holds out *some* hope that Emil may still become, in time, a human being again.

Twelve Million Like Him in Germany

Rehabilitating Emil is a decidedly tough proposition, but if a couple of Americans can't handle one such problem, how is the world to deal with twelve million Emils growing up in Germany?

"Tomorrow the World" is no masterpiece as a piece of writing. It sags occasionally despite the efforts of the stage director, Elliott Nugent, to keep things moving. And it is not always as eloquent as one might wish.

But it is excellently cast and played to the hilt, not only by the adults, but by its child actors as well.

Young Skippy Homeier, who is making his stage debut in this play, gives a performance as the young Nazi that can only be described as extraordinary. His is an enormously exacting and difficult role for any actor, and the skill with which he conveys the master-race mentality, the treacherous scheming, and the growing perplexities of this frighteningly alien youngster is amazingly effective and sometimes very moving.

Young Joyce Van Patten—who will alternate in the role of the Professor's young daugter with Nancy Nugent—gives a spirited and often highly amusing performance as the little girl who refused to be scared of Emil, no matter what he did.

As the Professor, Ralph Bellamy catches the proper ingratiating easy-going quality of the typical American who lets things worry along until he gets good and mad, then lashes out in all directions.

Shirley Booth as the fiancee who helps wrestle with the Nazi problem child, turns in what is probably the best performance of her career in a role that, in other hands, might have let down the play rather badly.

A Play That Will Be Discussed

Dorothy Sands etches out a highly effective portrait as the Professor's exasperating but rather pathetic doting sister, and Edit Angold is very good as the German maid who won't listen to any of that Nazi nonsense. It's such goings-on that give decent Germans a bad name.

"Tomorrow the World" is a play that will cause a good deal of discussion. Anybody who indulges in the luxury of thinking now and then will want to see it.

Occasionally as you watch the play unfold, you will find yourself shaking your head a little and muttering: "No, that's just a bit too much. It's overdrawn. They're laying it on too thick!"

But is it? Are they? How can anybody be sure these days?

The more you think him over, Emil Bruckner is a terrifying child, and he is not just Emil, but the symbol of twelve million other Hitler Youths who will one day be an appalling world problem, if they aren't already.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
April 15, 1943

Tomorrow the World Opens at Barrymore

BURTON RASCOE

WELL, I simply find it hard to believe it is true—what I saw at the Ethel Barrymore Theater last night—a child actor, making his debut on the stage, holding the center of attention for two hours and a half in one of the most gruelling roles any actor, young or old, ever had to cope with—and holding it firmly, tensely in a veritable masterpiece of character projection. The boy's name is Skippy Homeier. The program says he has appeared in more than 600 radio programs during the past 22 months and this is his first appearance on the stage.

I'll get back to him in a minute; but last night was not just a triumph for one child actor; it was a triumph for another one also, who is likewise so much better than I can tell you in print that you will have to go and see for yourself—Joyce Van Patten, who will alternate with Nancy Nugent, the daughter of Elliott Nugent, director for the play. Utterly and unself-consciously her sweet, beautiful, adorable self, little Miss Van Patten plays her part exquisitely as a perfect counterbalance to the pitably warped and repellent character young Homeier has to play.

• • •

The Entire Cast Is Good

These two children are not only the spectacular hits of the newest sure-fire hit on Broadway; they ARE the play; they make it. And this is no disparagement of Ralph Bellamy and Shirley Booth, who are featured in the billing, for they both turn in warmly human, utterly convincing characterizations and endear themselves to the theater audience. Edit Angold is also good in the play; Dorothy Sands is good; Richard Tasker is good; even the other kids—Walter Kelly, Richard Tyler and Paul Porter, Jr.—are good. They are all swell, but the play would simply fall to pieces if Skippy Homeier and Joyce Van Patten weren't phenomenally good — particularly Master Homeier.

The play, by the way, is called Tomorrow the World. It is by James Gow and Arnaud d'Usseau, and is a highly original and ingenious drama written with great concision and skill. Our special thanks should go, I think, to Theron Bamberger, the producer, who had the vision and courage to take a play which he must have known would stand or fall by the performance of one child actor, and, moreover, not the sort of child actor who could handle parts like those which made Jackie Coogan and Freddie Bartholomew famous, but a part requiring all the resources of a skillful and experienced adult character actor and a faultless memory in the delivery of long and tricky speeches with a German accent. Elliott Nugent was the one Mr. Bamberger took his problem to, and that genius of direction showed he could solve the problem.

The play is about a professor of psychology who has adopted the son of a German psychologist who was his teacher, friend and brother-in-law and who had been thrown into a concentration camp, tortured and finally killed by the Nazis. The professor is a widower with a small daughter; he lives with his possessive sister, who runs his house. But he is in love with a teacher in the Play-school, where modern pedagogical systems for the correction of the behavior of children and the unflowering of the individual are used. Both the professor (Mr. Bellamy) and the teacher (Miss Booth) hold that environment and training are everything and that hereditary traits do not exist.

A Juvenile Nazi Arrives

Their theories are put to an excruciating test by the arrival (soon after the first act curtain goes up) of a horrible little beast—the very embodiment of the clever, shrewd, self-righteous cruelty, cold bloodedness and treachery we associate with Nazism. He has outwardly a repulsive, heel-clicking, bowing, hand-kissing punctilio and politeness, but there is nothing natural or human about him; he is devious, sly, a child robot, reciting the paranoiac gibberish of Hitler and Goebbels about the destiny of the German race. All the German propaganda cliches are there; he is a phonograph record. But a phonograph record that thinks and acts and is the insane dupe of the things he has been taught—believing them implicitly, even to denouncing his own father as a traitor and a cowardly suicide.

So this little reptile Michael Frame has taken into his home is more than a problem child. Soon, so crafty is he, he has one-half the household arrayed against the other half. He knows each of their weaknesses and plays upon them; they can't even see what has happened to them, through his guile, until the boy, in an excess of his delusion that he will win Der Fuehrer's favor and become a member of the Gestapo, seeks a laboratory key from Frame's desk, and when he is discovered by Patricia (Joyce Van Patten) he tries to murder her with a bookend, and, believing he has succeeded, runs away.

I shall not disclose the plot beyond this point. The solution is an august and thoughtful one, reached with great conviction and with great restraint. And, again, it carries complete conviction only because of the extraordinary histrionic resources of young Homeier and the charm of Joyce Van Patten.

This is a play you must see if you possibly can. It holds you breathless with excitement and completely under the illusion created. It is a psychological drama with wide implications and a serious message for the present time. And these two children give the play a quality which deserves the adjective great.

"Tomorrow the World"

NEW YORK TIMES
April 15, 1943

THE PLAY IN REVIEW
"Tomorrow the World"

LEWIS NICHOLS

TO a Spring season that has not found the Forties overwhelmed by new ideas, Theron Bamberber last evening brought "Tomorrow the World," by James Gow and Arnaud d'Usseau. It takes up the question, which is a timely one, of how German children can be brought back into the human race, endoctrined as they are with the Nazi philosophies. It does more, for on the theatre side only it gives a 12-year-old player named Skippy Homeier the chance to set himself up as one of the most virulent characters of the year; and it gives an audience an evening that is sometimes moving, sometimes exiciting and, in general, all on the credit side of the ledger.

The Messrs. Gow and d'Usseau apparently have been wondering about post-war planning also, and for their central character they use a twelve-year-old German. His father has been killed in a concentration camp and he has been brought up by the Nazi system. He is taken to the home of a midwestern American professor and, filled with the doctrine of a ruling race, tries a little spy work to help Hitler and refuses to believe the things he sees and hears about the workings of America. The authors say twelve-year-old Germans can be cured with patience and kindness.

* * *

There are flaws in "Tomorrow the World," of course. The early part of the play is on the slow side, and during the course of the action the central figure is made so despicable that his sudden reformation may appear as just another of his tricks to divide and conquer. But on the whole such matters may well be left alone, and as an excellent cast plays it to the direction of Elliott Nugent, the play fulfills many more promises than will the Horst Wessel song from which the title comes.

The evening quite clearly is Master Homeier's. Red-haired, slight, speaking in a studiously cultivated German accent, he manages to convey the impression that he is the personification of all the present evil in the world; when he has finished, an audience could see him strangled without a qualm.

'TOMORROW THE WORLD'

Play by James Gow and Arnaud d'Usseau; staging by Elliott Nugent; setting designed by Raymond Sovey; presented at the Barrymore Theater Wednesday, April 14, 1943. The cast:

Patricia Frame	Joyce Van Patten
Jessie Frame	Dorothy Sands
Frieda	Edit Angold
Michael Frame	Ralph Bellamy
Leona Richards	Shirley Booth
Emil Bruckner	Skippy Homeier
Fred Miller	Richard Taber
Dennis	Walter Kelly
Butler	Richard Tyler
Tommy	Paul Porter, Jr.

Another young player also is in the cast; last night it was Joyce van Patten, who is to alternate with Nancy Nugent as the ten-year-old daughter of the American professor. To fill this last role they have gone to Hollywood to recall to Broadway Ralph Bellamy, who is excellent; and in the other important part is Shirley Booth, as the school teacher who finally concludes the boy eventually may be saved. Dorothy Sands, Edit Angold and Richard Tauber also are in the cast, and Mr. Nugent has directed with a terseness and a knowledge of children that embraces even those suffering from Nazi delusions.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
April 15, 1943

A Preview of a Post-War Problem

LOUIS KRONENBERGER

Tomorrow The World poses in miniature one of the great problems of the post-war world: the possibility of rehabilitating the millions of German children who have been indoctrinated with Nazism. The play anticipates the problem in terms of a 12-year old German whose mother was American and who comes over here to live with his American relatives. His mother had died when he was a baby, and his liberal German father had been long ago killed off in a concentration camp. The boy himself had been turned into a complete little Nazi.

He has only contempt for American "softness"; he is arrogant, conniving, deceitful; he spits on his father's memory; he tries to turn the members of the household against one another. They, being enlightened people, persevere in their efforts to re-educate him. Only after he almost commits murder are they ready to admit they have failed, and to hand him over to the police. But by finding the chink in his armor, and by asking themselves what chance there is of some day handling millions of such kids if they cannot handle one, they decide to keep him with them. And at curtain time he has begun to change.

The play, partly because of its very capable acting, succeeds in holding your interest. It is a kind of brat melodrama that is also a social preachment: the authors, without minimizing the difficulties, are pleading for an enlightened approach to a terrible future problem. They plead at moments with force, though in any really significant sense, *Tomorrow The World* is an unsatisfactory play.

For one thing, it is unevenly and at times very clumsily written. The end, in particular, is pat and sloppy in its effect. For another thing the play too often refuses to be truly serious, descending to all kinds of stock "popular" devices. Beyond this, I suspect that a novel's psychological approach to the little Nazi would be more rewarding than the theater's behavioristic one; and his development ought to be extended over many months rather than telescoped into a few days and three acts. As it stands, the play is merely popular fare.

Skippy Homeier plays the little German with unusual skill and conviction. Shirley Booth plays the Jewish teacher, whom the boy detests, with remarkable naturalness and understanding; Ralph Bellamy and Dorothy Sands are capable in other parts, and little Joyce Van Patten makes a charming child. Elliott Nugent's directions is skillful.

NEW YORK JOURNAL AMERICAN
April 15, 1943

Ralph Bellamy Heads Cast of Play That Bares Horror Nazi Inflict on Youth

JOHN ANDERSON

IN ALL of the scores of anti-Nazi plays which have moved across the New York stage in the past eight years none, I think, has touched quite the level of fascination, revulsion and horror created last night at the Ethel Barrymore in "Tomorrow and the World," by James Gow and Arnaud d'Usseau.

Other plays have drenched the stage in bloody grease paint, and wrenched us with scenes of torture and terror. The new play quietly and with shattering effect lets us behold not only the physical violence of the Nazis, but the mental and spiritual violence they do to their own youth in their cunning hope to capture the future.

It is more than an engrossing play; it is a plain warning, forceful, dramatic and challenging, and it has in it a performance of such uncanny honesty by a youngster named Skippy Homeier that it takes on the nature of a wide-awake nightmare.

Young Monster

To get the fullest effect of contrast the authors have shrewdly set their play in a Midwestern university town, in the home of a youngish professor of chemistry engaged in some important war research. Through some devious diplomatic deal he has arranged to take charge of his sister's 12-year-old son, Emil, who, as hardly more than an infant, was left parentless in Hitler's Reich when his mother died, and his father, a German scholar and Nazi hater, was murdered in a concentration camp.

With such a half-American hostage on their hands the Nazis plotted the careful use of the lad, taught him that his father was a traitor, poisoned him with all the party doctrines, and then, when the time was ripe, released their young swastika-braided monster into the bosom of a friendly American family wishing only to take care of him.

The results are appalling. They look upon him as a bad child, and he looks upon them as his enemies. It is as if the vicious brat in Miss Hellman's "The Children's Hour" had been transplanted into "The Watch On the Rhine." He is a spy and a liar. With all the adult Nazi tricks he tries to divide the household to conquer it, and winds up by nearly killing the professor's little daughter because she found him ransacking the professor's desk and threatened gayly to blab.

Deeply Moving

The point is that he has been trained away from every decent human emotion, and the authors' warning is that when Hitler is done for there will be 12,000,000 such mentally distorted children in Germany for the world to deal with before the Nazi infection is scoured out.

In spite of the occasional patness of the plot, and some rather explicit dialogue, the play is always absorbing, and it does reach in its final scene a passage of profound compassion, sensitive, and deeply moving. It is when the young superman is caught in his crime, loses the veneer bravado of the little monster, and confesses in the stormy tears of a normal child the calculated torture of his Nazi "education."

It is then that Master Homeier, with extraordinary power and skill, evokes from an audience led to loathe him for two acts the grieving sympathy and choking emotion of people who can see in a lost and heartbroken child the depravity of people who had poisoned their young as cynically as they had killed off their aged and useless. It is a scene of sharp anguish, human and humane, and its wet-eyed tragedy is an eloquent comment on the post-war future.

Excellent Cast

For his production Mr. Bamberger has engaged an excellent cast, and Elliott Nugent's direction is enormously helpful. Ralph Bellamy makes his first appearance on the Broadway stage since his spectacular debut in "Roadside" a dozen years ago—a debut followed, of course, by the Hollywood snatch. He plays the tolerant professor with easy simplicity, good humor, and likeable directness.

Shirley Booth is excellent as the young teacher whose marriage to the widowed professor is disrupted by the young Nazi through racial prejudice, and Dorothy Sands provides a deftly amusing and effective sketch of the boy's aunt, who lends herself foolishly to his rancid scheme. The professor's extremely young daughter was delightfully played last night by Joyce Van Patten, though Mr. Nugent's daughter, Nancy, will alternate in the part.

I imagine a good many playgoers will ultimately see both of them by the simple process of seeing the play twice. See it once, by all means.